



TOWN OF LONGBOAT KEY

Vision Plan

**Adopted
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**Town of Longboat Key
501 Bay Isles Road
Longboat Key, Florida 34228**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Longboat Key Renewed: A plan to keep Longboat Key invigorated over the next twenty years

Section 1: The Vision

BACKGROUND

In 2005, the Town of Longboat Key began the visioning process, initiated citizen involvement, and created a subcommittee comprised of members of the Planning and Zoning Board and the Town Commission. The developed plan was presented to the Town Commission in 2007. In 2008, the international economy was hobbled as credit markets seized. The United States economy was formally in economic recession. The residential and commercial real estate markets, small and large businesses, and governments on the local and state levels were negatively impacted by the precarious financial conditions in the United States and abroad. In 2010, despite an economic stimulus program commenced by the federal government, the international economy is still troubled and the negative impacts on real estate and business continue. It is in this environment that a revisiting of the vision plan submitted to the Town in 2007 has taken place.

THE VISION

This Vision for Longboat Key contains common sense strategies and tactics which both preserve and promote Longboat Key to benefit existing and future residents and businesses with broad based input from our residential and business community. ***The core values are to create and reinforce a welcoming community and government atmosphere with a common sense approach to managing the mix of resident, visitor, and commercial uses of Longboat Key.*** The plan is a framework for our elected and appointed leaders to consider as they deliberate and decide the matters and policies affecting Longboat Key going forward.

WHY THIS VISION

Numerous factors make Longboat Key a special place:

- the natural environment such as its beaches and the bay, warm weather, barrier island status with limited access, and a location near to, but separated from more urban areas
- the visual and physical profile of the built environment. The Town has promoted a low- to mid-rise profile that is protected by the Town's regulations to guard against the development of a "condo canyon" as exists in other beachfront communities
- the amenities for residents are generally available on the Key, minimizing the need to go off the island for basic retail, dining (including waterfront and outdoor dining), and hospitality services
- the island is more than simply a retirement community in the classic Florida model. The Town is not a business center, nor is it a suburb whose primary function is housing for the workforce. It is a recreational community that provides for the active lifestyles of full-time and part-time residents, some fully or partially

retired, and some still fully active in the workplace. The island's amenities include tennis centers, a recreation center, parks, picnic areas, a multi-modal path spanning the length of the island, and an art center

- the people - the residents and visitors to Longboat Key. It is the people who create a sense of community, whose values emphasize the slow paced, comfortable lifestyle that characterizes the Town, and whose desire for quality will maintain the community into the future
- the Key's proximity to Sarasota and its substantial arts environment, as well as the ready access to the Tampa/St. Petersburg area, is an important part of the special character of the community
- the people of Longboat Key are willing to take the financial steps necessary through local obligation bonds and ad valorem taxes to ensure the continuation of the level of service necessary to maintain and enhance the unique character of the island that attracted so many people to it in the past

HOW WE GET THERE

Based upon this vision, which is set forth in this section, our next step was to formulate a plan for its realization and implementation over the course of the next 20 years. In brief, this plan is designed to ensure that for the next 20 years the Town of Longboat Key will strive to:

- retain those features that make the Town a special place enabling residents and visitors the ability to dine, recreate and shop on Longboat Key;
- remain a community of high-quality buildings and landscaping;
- restore and sustain the historic balance of residential, tourism, and commercial;
- creatively reinvigorate underutilized commercial areas;
- maintain or upgrade the infrastructure on an ongoing basis, including private and public services and amenities;
- support restaurants on the island, encouraging viability and diversification, as well as waterfront and outdoor dining options; and,
- protect, preserve and improve the natural environment.

THE CHALLENGES

Within the context of a distinctive place that is undergoing change, the shared vision for the future is to enhance the special nature of Longboat Key. Some of the current changes and issues, which impact the future, are happening now. The community identified the following examples during the development of this Vision Plan:

- The affordability of property ownership on Longboat Key is being impacted by higher county and local taxes (with severe upward pressure from Town of Longboat Key employee pension costs and beach renourishment expenditures) and insurance costs.

- The Town's major resorts are over 20-years old and are showing their age. The Longboat Key Club and the Hilton Longboat Key Resort managements are examining, each in their own way, what they want to be over the next 20 years. The Colony Beach and Tennis Resort is currently in a state of flux and the property is in need of revitalization or redevelopment. Town Plaza I and II and Whitney BeachPlaza retail complexes are significant properties going through the same exercise.
- The "off season" retail base has been significantly reduced, increasing the disparity from the "peak season" population, making it more difficult to make a 12-month retail operation successful. The peak season has shortened, limiting the significant retail base to four months.
- The number of units devoted exclusively to tourism has decreased as resort operators have found the economics of operating in a highly seasonal environment difficult to sustain.
- Residential communities have changed from neighborhoods of Florida-style ranch homes to an area with an increasing number of "McMansions" and currently have a substantial number of foreclosures and the attendant "blight".
- The Town's successful family businesses are finding that the next generation has no plans to continue in the family business. This contributes to the desire to sell out for other uses.
- The local arts center is no longer an independent community based institution, but is now part of the Ringling College of Art and Design.
- The fragile state of the restaurant industry on the island.

What is the potential future of Longboat Key if nothing is done? Longboat Key will be a much less enjoyable and convenient place to live, if all basic necessities, from gasoline to groceries to medical needs to entertainment, will only be found off the Island. Visitors will still be amazed at the beauty of the island, but may also come to the conclusion that there is absolutely nothing to do here beyond the beaches and possibly the resort. They will opt to purchase homes where they can have both - beauty and the conveniences that Longboat Key should offer.

The challenge and opportunity is to manage change in ways that retain, reinvigorate, or enhance the quality, the distinctiveness, the culture, and the lifestyle that make Longboat Key so special. The purpose of the Vision Plan is to anticipate longer-term trends and issues, while dealing with short-term factors that will impact the Key and propose strategies that will ensure Longboat Key remains a high quality residential community.

Section 2: Additional Strengths and Weaknesses That Could Impact the Town's Desired Future

Fortunately, Longboat Key has recently had a reasonable balance of residential, tourism, and commercial land uses such that we are not trying to reinvent the wheel or establish totally new segments. The Town is working to rebalance and reinvigorate the community before any further significant decline occurs. In March 2008, the voters of Longboat Key overwhelmingly passed a referendum to allow for the voluntary rebuild of existing tourism and multifamily developments that may not have been able to rebuild otherwise. Additionally, a separate referendum was approved allowing the distribution of an additional 250 tourism units for new or existing developments. In order to determine what our vision for the future should be, it is helpful to assess the strengths we have to work with and build on and the weaknesses we need to consider and address.

Earlier the plan provided a list of factors that make Longboat Key a special place. This section lists additional strengths and known weaknesses that will impact the Town as it seeks to institute the vision. The ability of the Town to change the influence of these factors varies; and, their significance will vary during the next 20 years.

STRENGTHS:

- Current and future tourism developments generate a greater need for retail businesses and services than could otherwise be supported, provide future buyers for residences thus keeping property values relatively high, provide tax revenues for the Town, and provide places to stay for visiting relatives.
- The Key is well positioned for a segment of the baby boom retirees
- Economic growth in the region, and the advent of communications technology, could lead to more executives choosing housing and business opportunities on the Key, leading to a potential small demographic shift
- As Sarasota continues to develop, the urban amenities available to residents of the Key will improve
- While the town's infrastructure is aging, the town has implemented a program to upgrade existing systems and has been able to stay ahead of other communities in this regard

WEAKNESSES:

- The town is a barrier island vulnerable to environmental change and damage, as well as red tide and other environmental impacts
- The combination of rising property taxes and rising insurance costs has made property ownership, particularly second home ownership, less attractive on the Key
- Pressures on water supply will continue to increase. The Town has to purchase water from Manatee County for its potable and a portion of irrigation supply needs
- The limited access to the Key, via SR 789/Gulf of Mexico Drive (GMD), a two-lane highway, is the primary cause of traffic congestion during the peak months of the

year. Traffic on and off the Key will remain challenging and there will be continued use of Gulf of Mexico Drive as a throughway between Sarasota and Manatee Counties

- Longboat Key's cost of living dictates that the majority of workers reside off-island. Frequently, higher wages are needed to attract workers to staff jobs on the Key. Convenient public transit is required for workers to access the Key
- Need for increased health care services and "Aging In Place" amenities
- Lack of up-to-date telecommunication services

Section 3: Goals, Strategies, and Action Steps

This section of the plan details the goals, strategies, and action steps that will contribute to achievement of the vision as a preferred residential community offering a very high quality of life for its residents. The goals of the plan, while not listed in an order suggesting priority, will provide direction for the coming 20 years. Implementation and achievement of the strategies and action steps, including the initiation/timing and responsibility, will vary depending upon circumstances over the 20 years.

Goal 1: Help prevent Longboat Key from becoming unaffordable to current residents

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. Develop a coordinated message to be used by all Longboat Key officials and staff regarding the impact on Longboat Key of tax practices of the School Boards, County Commissions, and other public bodies	on-going	Town Commission	Finance Department - Policy Statement
2. Develop a targeted education and outreach strategy to external taxing bodies to (1) reduce the tax burden they are placing on the Key and/or (2) provide more benefits to the Key	on-going	Town Commission	Finance Department - Develop Strategy Paper
3. Develop and participate in sustained policy efforts at state and federal levels to develop property and disaster insurance alternatives for coastal communities that help those communities remain economically viable	on-going	Town Commission	Appoint liaison for Town Commission
4. Develop a Town function or position, which would seek to secure more external funding to the Town to support services or infrastructure	on-going	Town Commission	Create a funding development position or committee (with existing staff or voluntary citizen(s))

Goal 2: Continue to maintain the high level of public services and safety on Longboat Key

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. Maintain accredited and trained staff	on-going	Town Manager	Maintain adequate budget
2. Maintain appropriate facilities	on-going	Town Manager	Maintain adequate budget
3. Keep public safety plans updated	on-going	Town Manager	Annual review
4. Increase public education and information on public safety, particularly disaster issues	on-going	Town Manager	Increase public education – CRS Manager
5. Maintain the high level of readiness for disaster response	on-going	Town Manager	Maintain training and education
6. Formalize a compensation policy that provides competitive salary and benefit package for town employees at or above the 75 percentile for surrounding communities. Conduct a study of current employee pay practices (direct and fringe) of surrounding communities of comparable size	on-going	Town Commission	Maintain adequate budget
7. Continue adherence to best management practices (BMPs)	on-going	Town Manager	Develop yearly review of BMPs - Public Works Department
8. Conduct cost/benefit studies on any major capital item	on-going	Town Manager	Develop reporting form - Finance Department
9. Encourage regional solutions	on-going	Town Commission	Maintain liaisons to regional groups
10. Continue planning and funding for adequate capital maintenance	on-going	Town Manager	Maintain adequate budget

Goal 3: Encourage improvement, redevelopment, and development of commercial

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. Encourage quality redevelopment consistent with vision			
a. Pursue collaborative efforts regarding major developments of the Key to formulate a master redevelopment plan for their parcels	on-going	Town Manager/ Town Commission	Private development proposals
b. Explore new commercial/tourism land use applications and development options for appropriate sites. For example: consider creating such a zoning district for the Whitney Beach Plaza and the adjacent properties to the north; redevelopment of the Bay Isles Parkway and the Town Plaza I and II developments, including the adjacent bank properties and the adjacent vacant residential parcel (formerly known as MODA); raise awareness of the advantages of combining adjacent commercial properties for greater flexibility per site; and, consider increased density incentives, a mix of office and retail use, with a greater opportunity for increased landscape buffers between commercial and residential zones, as well as the ability to provide larger areas for landscaping that is more consistent with the residential character of the Key. Commercial sites other than those within the Bay Isles Planned Development and Whitney Beach Plaza should be similarly examined by the Planning and Zoning Board for possible redevelopment	underway	Planning and Zoning Board	Review by the Planning and Zoning Board
2. Support commercial revitalization and rebuilding that is compatible with the Key, including building heights, viewscales, and building mass and intensity	on-going	Planning and Zoning Board	Review revitalization ordinance

Goal 4: Encourage improvement, redevelopment, and development of tourism

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. Enhance marketing efforts designed to attract new visitors via a public-private partnership between the Town, Chamber, and Tourist Development Councils, ensuring that the public is adequately made aware of the short-term rental units on the island	on-going	Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Report
2. Obtain annual marketing report on efforts to market Longboat Key as a tourism destination, which shall include data regarding the number of short-term rental units on the island and their annual occupancy rate	annually	Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Report

Goal 5: Encourage improvement of residential properties that maintain quality and character of existing neighborhoods

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. Encourage the Village Association to preserve the unique characteristics of the Village with the creation of a Village Master Plan	2011	Planning and Zoning Board Town Commission	Planning Staff with the Village Association

Goal 6: Protect and conserve the natural environment and maintain the beauty of the Key

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. When economically feasible, adopt appropriate best practices used by other local governments pertaining to:			
a. Reasonable green building strategies	on-going	Town Commission	Building Division Staff Study
b. Water conservation	on-going	Town Commission	Public Works Staff Study
c. Alternative fuels for the Town's fleet	on-going	Town Manager	Public Works Staff Study
d. Electricity and energy conservation	on-going	Town Manager	Public Works Staff Study FPL energy audit
2. Continue a lobbying strategy with like-minded communities on the red tide issue	on-going	Town Commission	Continue participation with START
3. Continue to participate with other governments in cooperative efforts to protect and restore Sarasota Bay	on-going	Town Commission	Continue participation with Sarasota Bay Estuary program
4. Improve landscaping efforts on Longboat Key			
5. Continue to enforce the fertilizer ordinance to reduce pesticide and fertilizer run-off into the Gulf of Mexico and Sarasota Bay, including public education programs	on-going	Town Commission	Public Works Department
6. Develop a public education campaign on Florida Friendly and invasive plant species eradication	on-going	Town Commission	Public Works Department Planning and Zoning Department
7. Develop and implement a beautification plan for Gulf of Mexico Drive through the utilization of a committee consisting of, but not limited to, citizen representatives who are landscape architects and design professionals, licensed town staff, and Garden Club representatives.	on-going	Town Commission	Public Works Department Longboat Key Garden Club
8. Continue to monitor the Town's water situation and alternative water systems to allow the Town to secure its own water source.	on-going	Town Commission	Public Works Staff Study
9. Participate in Florida and National League of Cities and US Conference of Mayors forums on environmental issues	on-going	Town Commission/ Town Manager	Maintain adequate budget
10. Periodically examine the beach management program as needed, including regional cooperation	on-going	Town Manager/ Public Works	Maintain Budget and State Permitting
11. Seek adequate supply of alternative irrigation water to keep the island green and beautiful	on-going	Town Commission	Public Works Staff Study

Goal 6: Protect and conserve the natural environment and maintain the beauty of the Key - Continued

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
12. Revitalize community beautification efforts that serve to protect the natural environment, including Gulf of Mexico Drive	on-going	Town Commission	Public Works Staff Study Longboat Key Garden Club
13. Seek opportunities to purchase open space for public use, with public input, as to features, uses, and costs	on-going	Town Commission	Town Manager update Commission Longboat Key Center for the Arts
14. Encourage public art in public places	on-going	Town Commission	Planning Staff – Resolution Longboat Key Center for the Arts
15. Continue to protect endangered species including, but not limited to, sea turtles	on-going	Town Commission	Code Enforcement in partnership with Mote Marine Laboratory
16. Explore new technologies in renewable energy applications	on-going	Town Commission	Public Works/Planning, Zoning and Building
17. Continue to adopt additional conservation methods to further decrease the amount of water used for both consumption and irrigation	on-going	Town Manager/ Town Commission	Public Works Staff Recommendation
18. Explore new technologies in potable and irrigation water supply and distribution	on-going	Town Manager/ Town Commission	Public Works Staff Study

Goal 7: Promote community health

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. Review the possibility of creating a community health center on the island	on-going	Town Manager	Human Resources Department Chamber of Commerce
2. Continue efforts to construct sidewalks on Gulf of Mexico Drive where appropriate	on-going	Town Manager	Public Works Department
3. Work with landscaping companies to reduce pollution and alternative ways of managing yard debris and tree pruning	on-going	Town Manager	Public Works - Develop BMPs Longboat Key Federation of Condominiums
4. Develop policies to further minimize light pollution	on-going	Planning and Zoning Board	Planning, Zoning and Building Department Staff Study
5. Encourage elder care programs and aging in place facilities, including transportation options. Promote healthy, vibrant aging with wellness programs and provide information on available on- and off-island services and programs for residents and caregivers	on-going	Town Manager	Town Manager, Chamber of Commerce, and Churches and Synagogue

Goal 8: Keep or Improve the Island's amenities important to resident's quality of life

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. Encourage the modernization and redevelopment of tourism facilities. Support efforts of the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Council to promote tourism and economic growth consistent with the vision	on-going w/ annual report	Town Commission	Town Commission with the Chamber of Commerce including an annual report from the Chamber
2. Review Town Codes to identify and develop more opportunities or incentives for retail amenities critical to residents and visitors	September 2011	Planning and Zoning Board	Planning Staff Study with the Chamber of Commerce
3. Encourage redevelopment strategies that would enhance retail amenities for residents such as mid-priced restaurants, a small cinema, etc.	2011	Planning and Zoning Board	Planning Staff Study with the Chamber of Commerce
4. Communicate that the Key wants its local businesses to prosper and that it will regularly review its policies to ensure consistency with this intent	on-going	Town Commission	Planning Staff Study
5. Encourage redevelopment of existing retail centers appropriate to the site	on-going	Planning and Zoning Board	Planning Staff Review
6. Form a public-private collaboration to develop an appropriately scaled community center	2011	Town Commission	Form Citizen Committee
7. Pursue an up-to-date communications infrastructure so that residents have full access to advanced communications technology	on-going	Town Commission	As directed
8. Create more access points for kayaks, canoes or small sail craft	on-going	Town Commission	Public Works Department

Goal 9: Retain the service workforce needed for quality of life on the Key

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. Improve public transportation options, including transit shelters, that enable workers to more easily get to worksites	on-going	Town Commission	Metropolitan Planning Organization
2. Participate in workforce housing initiatives in Manatee and Sarasota Counties	on-going	Town Commission	Manatee and Sarasota Counties

Goal 10: Minimize regular and seasonal traffic congestion

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. Continue participation in regional transportation planning that would provide other alternatives that would reduce the need to go through Longboat Key to get to Sarasota	on-going	Town Commission	Metropolitan Planning Organization
2. Continue to monitor traffic signals for optimal traffic flow	on-going	Town Manager	Public Works Department
3. Continue working with the US Coast Guard on the seasonal bridge opening schedules at the various bridges that impact Longboat Key	on-going	Town Commission	Metropolitan Planning Organization
4. Continue to take positions on regional traffic issues that affect Longboat Key citizens (for example, roundabouts and speed limits on U.S. 41)	on-going	Town Commission	Metropolitan Planning Organization
5. Design, market, and promote appropriate and viable public transportation services for Longboat Key	on-going	Sarasota County Area Transit	Sarasota County Area Transit
6. Create destination points and routes so that public transportation lessens the impact of traffic on Gulf of Mexico Drive	on-going	Town Commission	Public Works Staff Study
7. Focus on supporting trolley services, including shelters	on-going	Town Commission	Metropolitan Planning Organization

Goal 11: Increase citizen involvement and engagement with Town government

Strategy	Action Steps		
	Initiation/Timing	Responsibility	Action
1. Encourage the Town Commission to speak at neighborhood or condominium associations or otherwise engage the public in other informal forums	on-going	Town Commission	Public Information Officer
2. Encourage people to e-mail, use the suggestion box, attend public meetings, and other mechanisms to inform the Town of any local policies and regulations that it views as problematic	on-going	Town Commission	Public Information Officer
3. Use the Town Charter review process to discuss possible changes to the structure and system of Town government including, but not limited to, length of terms, single member districts, options for a stronger mayor form, and options for funding elections	on-going	Charter Review Committee	Final Report By Charter Review Committee
4. The Town Commission shall periodically review the Town's internal processes (e.g., budget process, human resource policies, etc.)	on-going	Town Commission	Form A Committee
5. Appoint citizen or staff member to actively and consistently represent the interests of Longboat Key at School Boards, County Commissions, and other taxing bodies	on-going	Town Commission	Appoint Liaisons
6. Develop time-limited and role specific projects related to the vision plan and seek citizens with specific skills to participate in those projects	on-going	Town Manager	Town Clerk - Advertisement
7. Continue to encourage residents who will serve on regional forums as well as town committees and boards	on-going	Town Manager	Town Clerk - Advertisement

Vision Plan Appendix¹ – November 2007

In 2005, the Town of Longboat Key Town Commission authorized the development of a 20-year vision plan document. With the guidance and assistance of the Arrington-Marlowe consulting firm, the Town crafted the plan with the input and participation of the Island's citizens, property owners, business owners, and developers. Numerous Focus Group meetings (including those with affinity groups) were held to obtain vital public information and feedback on the vision of the community for the next 20 years. Through solicited and unsolicited written comments, Town Hall meetings, telephone and personal interviews, and additional Focus Group meetings, the Town tested the public's response to various draft versions of the plan document. The Town of Longboat Key Vision Plan is the culmination of two years of work by Arrington-Marlowe, the Town Commission, the Town's Planning and Zoning Board, the Town Attorney, Town Staff, and various established subcommittees throughout the process, as well as all of the members of the public who volunteered their time toward the goal of establishing a vision for the future of Longboat Key. The Vision Plan Appendix provides some of the information collected throughout the plan development process, as well as supporting data.

Points of Community Consensus

The strength of a vision plan is directly proportional to the level of community consensus in support of it. The following points enjoyed a high level of consensus and were valued input in the writing of the plan:

- There is strong support for the vision of “keeping Longboat Longboat”. While there are nuances in that agreement it clearly means protecting the natural environment, maintaining a small town feel, preventing significant increases in density, maintaining a low-mid rise skyline, and keeping basic retail amenities for residents.
- There is clear desire to maintain basic retail services designed for residents on the Key. The community appears receptive to supporting legislative tax relief or some limited incentives as long as these measures are not rewarding bad management or overly trying to influence market/economic dynamics.
- Rising property taxes and insurance costs are negatively impacting everyone, businesses, and second homeowners in particular. Maintaining a reasonable degree of affordability, along with business services and the second home marketplace are critical factors in being able to keep Longboat “Longboat”.
- There is the strong desire to help maintain restaurants on the Key, coupled with the desire for increased outdoor dining options. There is a general willingness for some level of relaxed regulations if that would make a difference.

¹ Appendix provides a discussion of the Town's history and background, as well as the visioning process and resultant findings that formed the basis of the 20-year Vision Plan document that was accepted by the Town Commission in November 2007. Any conflict between the Vision Plan dated February 7, 2011, and anything within this appendix shall be resolved in the favor of the February 7, 2011, Vision Plan, as adopted.

- Overall there is recognition of the value of tourism and the desire to maintain the “limited, historic” tourism traditional to the Key. There is clear agreement on the type of tourism the Key does not want.
- There is clear willingness to allow existing tourist lodging facilities to re-build at least the current number of units.
- There is strong appreciation for the public safety services provided by the Town and a clear desire to maintain the quality of those services.
- Regional or larger solutions will be required for many of the issues facing Longboat. However, that did not mean LBK had no responsibility for or role to play in these broader issues such as water supply, Sarasota Bay protection, etc. A continued effort to work with other local governments and other bodies to address these issues is encouraged.
- There is strong agreement to protect and maintain the natural environment of the Key, particularly the beach.
- The word “balance” seems to encapsulate the desires of residents. Keeping a balance between tourism and residential needs, keep a balance between retail services and the residential character.

Population and Economic Growth in the Region

Both Manatee and Sarasota Counties have experienced growth pressures during the past decade, and project continued population growth. For example, in 2005 unincorporated Manatee County reportedly issued nearly 6,000 new housing permits. Manatee’s growth is happening in many neighborhoods, including fast growing areas such as Ellenton and Parrish. 2004 population projections were 296,385 for Manatee County, with 2030 population projections of 453,900, a 52.8% increase.

Sarasota County growth is somewhat more focused in communities along the Interstate 75 corridor. Census data for Sarasota County indicates steady rates of growth averaging +/- 2.7% over the last three years, with cities such as North Port leading the way with steady double digit rates of growth during six of the past seven years. The Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) at the University of Florida projects that Sarasota County will continue to experience steady growth over the next 25 years, growing from 367,867 residents in 2005, to approximately 532,000 residents in 2030, a nearly 45% increase in total residents.

The Sarasota County Comprehensive Plan calls for the growth to occur primarily within the Urban Service Areas locating the highest densities within Commercial Centers and Corridors, Planned Commerce Developments, and designated Town and Village Centers outside these urban service corridors, which allow densities up to 25 units per acre.

Efforts are continuing in the adjacent City of Sarasota to encourage redevelopment and infill growth in the downtown area. The City of Sarasota had an estimated permanent population in 2005 of 55,596, and a functional population (resident plus seasonal population) of 80,994 persons. In 2030 the estimated permanent population will be 65,334 persons, with a functional population of 95,179. The City characterizes itself as nearly built-out, emphasizing policies to promote infill. Toward that end, the City reports that between 1999 and 2005 nearly 12,500 building permits were issued, including 10,746 permits associated with remodels or redevelopment activities.

Current Population Numbers vs. Fewer Residents

Given density controls and community preferences, it seems unlikely that significant population growth will occur on Longboat Key. However, given changes in housing preferences toward larger houses and demographic trends toward smaller families, there is the possibility that the population of the Key may decrease. A trend toward the construction of mega-homes on existing home sites and the combining multiple contiguous residential lots for the construction of a single large house is seen on Longboat Key as well as in other Florida communities. While the phenomenon of condominium redevelopment is not yet widespread, there are projections that older multifamily structures will either be replaced with newer, larger units or that existing developments may be sold and remodeled into fewer, larger units. If either of these events occurs, Longboat Key could have fewer residential units in the future.

Year Round vs. Second Home Population

Currently, Longboat Key is predominately comprised of second home owners and so the first assumption that can be made about the future is that the current year-round/second home owner mix will remain the same. However, there are two other trends that might emerge. One is that as homes increase in value, the island will be increasingly comprised of extremely wealthy people for whom Longboat Key is a second, third, or fourth home. Another trend is that the rising property taxes for non-homesteaded property coupled with rising insurance costs will significantly reduce the proportion of second home owners. This trend will mean the future Longboat Key will be more a community of full-time residents than the current mix.

Regional Economic Development

Both Sarasota and Manatee Counties have adopted plans and policies to encourage various forms of economic development and redevelopment. Manatee County's EAR update includes various strategies to attract high wage paying businesses and jobs to the area, along with a mix of strategies to continue support of existing tourism and agricultural industries. The County has adopted many strategies to accomplish these goals, including enhanced recreation and tourism activities. At this point, it appears the focus has been within urban areas, although promotion of the County's coastal areas may be compatible with the plan.

The local Chamber of Commerce has recently established an economic development council on which the Town participates via a seat filled by the Mayor. Since sustaining the historic tourism of the Key is a long-term goal of this vision plan, coordination with this council, as well as the economic and tourism development efforts of both counties, will offer benefits for the Key. It should be noted that the Sarasota Convention and Tourism Bureau and Manatee County promote Longboat Key. A portion of the bed tax is used for marketing each county, which benefits the Key. As a result of the current trend towards reduced tourism beds, the bed tax revenue has decreased and this trend may continue, affecting not only the Sarasota Convention and Tourism Bureau budget, but other programs supported by the bed tax, including beach re-nourishment.

Other common efforts for both counties are the revitalization and creation of vibrant mixed-use commercial areas on the mainland. These developments, as constructed or redeveloped, could offer more shopping, dining, and business opportunities off-island to Longboat residents.

Additionally, as high tech and other high wage paying businesses are attracted to the area through economic development efforts, demand for executive housing will be an ancillary result. The Key offers high quality neighborhoods and residential enclaves, many with beach and bay water access that are often desired by corporate executives. The ability to operate a home-based business may also be of increasing significance.

The Baby Boomer Retirement

The retirement of the baby boom generation will have significant impacts on the workplace, on the leisure industry, and on destination communities such as Longboat. Some general themes are that baby boomers will want more active retirements such as that offered on Longboat Key, and that many baby boomers will semi-retire in the sense they may still be somewhat engaged in income producing activities. The newer residents of Longboat in many ways exemplify these projected trends.

State Property Tax Policy

Rising property values and subsequent increases in property taxes are impacting Longboat in ways that could further change the Key. While property taxes have risen for everyone the increases have most negatively affected second homes and businesses that do not have the homestead exemption. It has placed pressures on commercial property owners and business to either increase rents or prices (to cover both taxes and insurance) or, if eligible, consider converting to residential uses.

Should these trends continue, the Key is at risk of losing both basic retail services as well as decreases in property value if the second home market declines. The Florida legislature is debating the issue, and the rapid rise in property values in recent years has leveled off. The issue will remain significant until some public policy is established that alleviates the problem.

Workforce Housing and Availability of Service Workers

Both in Manatee and Sarasota Counties, one of the key growth concerns surround the affordability of much of the newest market-housing product to the average wage earner. Both jurisdictions are exploring strategies to ensure that a percentage of new growth includes workforce housing. In Sarasota County, inclusionary zoning regulations require new development within the Urban Service Boundary to provide a percentage of “community housing”.

In Manatee County, workforce housing is being framed in the term “affordable living”. This phrase is intended to address the costs of living including, but not limited to, the real estate costs of housing (e.g. land and structure). Toward that goal, the intent is to examine the broader cost of living index, such as transportation and energy costs borne by residents.

It is well acknowledged that cost of living on the barrier islands are beyond a reasonable workforce affordability index. Moreover, with the island communities at or reaching build-out projections, countywide policies, and programs have excluded the islands from their programs.

Shoreline and Coastal Issues

Sarasota County’s Comprehensive Plan, in particular, addresses the inventory of stabilized shoreline, as well as beach nourishment activities and concerns. It has been reported that at one time, as much as 23% of its Sarasota shoreline was hardened. However, as a result of the Town’s proactive beach management plan, which includes an island-wide restoration/fill project, essentially all of these hardening structures are covered with sand. The Town’s evaluation and appraisal report (EAR) update included policy changes that effectively prohibit the addition of any new armoring or groin construction within the community, unless it is integrated in the Town’s long-range beach management plan. The Town continues to actively stay abreast of coastal nourishment actions of its neighbors, and work regionally where necessary to help deter further erosion of the shoreline.

There are regional efforts from scientific and legislative perspectives. The Town has been a participant in those efforts. For a community that places high value on a quality beach experience, this issue is critical. However, solutions will require the participation of many parties, including continued Town participation in mitigation and clean up as well as continued support of research.

Surface Water Quality

Surface water quality issues have included concern for the Sarasota Bay watershed. Water quality in the watershed has improved with further improvements being sought since recent studies rate the Bay as “fair”. The City of Sarasota has initiated a septic replacement program, which should effectively eliminate this source of contamination

over time. In addition, the Sarasota County stormwater effort has nearly completed a program to improve flooding and water quality discharge from this basin into the Bay. Similarly, Manatee County has adopted strategies to fund and construct stormwater management systems in urban areas aimed at improving water quality.

Water Resources

Given rate increases and other demands upon Manatee County for water, Longboat Key has examined alternatives for irrigation sources. At this time, this examination has not yielded a viable supply or financially desirable alternative. Water conservation methods have helped to reduce the overall water usage, but no wholesale new source of irrigation water has proven feasible. Many of irrigation wells in the Town are declining in yield or water quality. Given that reclaimed water is not likely to be as readily available as hoped, the Town will need to find or seek new sources of irrigation water.

Manatee County is actively upgrading its water capacity to meet a projected water deficit in the face of substantial new demands for water from population growth. However, water capacity projects are focused in areas of growth corridors, rather than the barrier islands that are considered at build-out. Manatee County has stated that it will continue to enforce and implement water conservation requirements as one of its supply strategies, such as those instigated in 2003. Given that the Town is in a contractual relationship with Manatee County, it will need to continue discussion of conservation approaches and other supply issues with the County.

Climate Change

There is scientific consensus that climate change (global warming) is occurring, with a continuing debate about the human impact in that phenomenon. Regardless of causative factors, there is some likelihood over the next century of sea level rises. These rises are unlikely to occur within the 20 year time frame of this plan, but the potential impacts of global warming is a topic the Town will need to monitor during the course of the vision plan.

Transportation Issues

Longboat is impacted by significant pass-through traffic along GMD from points both north and south of the island. Given the restricted access, and the many constraints associated with adding additional lanes to increase capacity, transportation options are focused on Transportation Demand Management (TDM) methods, as opposed to capital improvement projects. The Town effectively implements most of the TDM measures. However, an increased interest in expanding transit options is being expressed by the Town, working with both counties. Since the Town of Longboat Key does not operate transit services, the community will continue to work collaboratively with both county systems.

Manatee County's Imagine Manatee plan identifies alternative forms of transportation to the automobile as one of its goals. Convenient, safe, and reliable transit systems are the base of the implementation strategies, and one that could prove beneficial for the Town. There is increased interest and effort in providing trolley service and connections to the Sarasota and Manatee County public transportation systems have been achieved. It appears both resident and workforce users could benefit from increased service, if convenient routes and sufficient headways were offered.

Natural Disasters and Insurance Costs

Everyone understands a hurricane of sufficient force and location could have a devastating effect on Longboat while hurricanes of lesser force or more distant locations can significantly disrupt life on the Key. These are simply facts of life for barrier island residents. As new structures are built, they are designed to mitigate these risks.

While the potential risks of hurricanes or some other form of natural disaster may impact decisions to remain on the Key or purchase on Longboat, it is the actual cost of insurance that is impacting the Town today. Rising insurance costs make it more difficult for current residents to remain, particularly if their homes are second homes. Rising insurance costs are now a factor in purchase decisions as well as a financial issue for current residents.

The State of Florida has taken some mitigating actions. However, a long-term solution is yet to emerge.

Rising Expectations for Quality

Understanding Longboat Key as a recreational or destination community means the community is judged by the presence of desired amenities. No such community can offer all desirable amenities. It can be assumed that people who choose to reside or visit Longboat Key prefer the type of amenities that the Key offers. This means the Island must protect or enhance its existing commercial services and recreational amenities, and strive to develop additional options desired by residents.

The challenge with amenities, particularly when viewed from a 20-year perspective is twofold. One, the expected quality usually rises. Some of these changing expectations are simply stylistic. Others, however, represent substantive improvements that people want in safety, energy efficiency, cost, design, timesavings, or choice of experience. Second, new amenities arise. Cell phones are now almost a necessity. 20 years ago there was no such expectation. It is not known today what may become expected over the next 20 years, but it is likely there will be one or more new amenities. The Town must be in the financial and technological position to respond when they emerge.

Longboat Key has many amenities today and some simply have to be maintained and protected to remain excellent. Examples are beach and bay access points, picnic areas, and sidewalks. Other features over the course of 20 years may have to be

improved. Some examples are the community center, tennis courts, and parks. Finally, some new or expanded amenities may need to be considered to meet the changing expectations. Examples include a small theatre, an expanded cultural arts or performing arts center, recreational facilities for children and grandchildren, and improved access to electronic services such as better cell phone service, and Internet connections.

Visitor/Guest Facilities and Tourism on the Key

At its core, Longboat Key is not a typical tourist community, but tourism is an important part of the economy which support retail services, real estate and restaurants, beach re-nourishment and other quality of life features of the Town. Many LBK residents first came to Longboat Key as tourists or visitors. Tourism is part of the Town's history. This plan proposes that it continue to be part of its future.

The word "tourism" evokes many reactions depending on the connotations one associates with it. There are clearly types of tourism that are not desirable for the Key. The only type of tourism that will fit well with Longboat in the future is its historic model: individuals, families, and business groups seeking a quiet and leisurely retreat.

Residents benefit by having tourists on the island, although the income of most residents is not tied to tourism. This fact, coupled with the negative connotations, for some, of the word tourism, makes it easy to say that tourism is not something to be encouraged in the future. However, limited tourism has been part of the Key and is an essential ingredient of the economy that supports the commercial services useful to all residents and provides future buyers for the Town's residential properties.

Keeping Basic Retail Amenities for Residents

Concerned residents want two things to occur with the commercial or retail sector of the Town. First, they would like to see improvements made to existing physical facilities. By this, they mean that too many of the existing commercial facilities look either dated or poorly maintained. Second, they would like to see:

- expansions of some current businesses such as a larger Publix;
- vacant stores are filled with additional services that would reduce the need to go off the Key such as health care services, bookstores, computer repair and supply services, and clothing stores.

In both cases, the desired improvements are designed to better serve those living on the island, not to attract shoppers from the mainland.

Part of the charm and distinctiveness of the Town is the fact that the Key is to a good degree self-contained. One does not have to drive off the island for most basic services. This fact is part of the slow paced, quiet nature of the community. Keeping the current commercial spaces viable will serve to help maintain the special character of Longboat Key into the future.

The businesses reported as most at risk are the local small businesses that may not be as financially strong or diverse as the chain stores doing business on the Key. These same businesses may be more sensitive to fluctuations in the number of people on the Key and have less capacity to survive business slowdowns due to fewer numbers of people on the Key for a period of time. The irony, of course, is that small local businesses make a business sector distinctive. They are the businesses that one cannot find everywhere. They are also the types of businesses that people associate with a small town feel. Having a national or regional chain store does not make a community distinctive by definition. Having a one of a kind restaurant does. To keep the Key distinctive, retaining a small town feel, the continued viability of the retail sector is important.

Infrastructure

Within the Town's infrastructure there are a number of issues. One is that the infrastructure of the Key is aging and the issue of replacement will become more significant over the next 20 years. A second issue is that of infrastructure improvement, in particular maintaining water and sewer infrastructure. Future issues could include placing electric utility lines underground for both aesthetic and public safety reasons as well as improvements that will ensure residents have access to current and future advances in telecommunications.

Aesthetics

The green and colorful beauty of Longboat is a critical part of the island's character. The protection of this physical beauty is so significant that any discussion of the future must address how the aesthetic environment will be protected and enhanced. Buried power lines, more landscaping along GMD, and use of Florida friendly landscaping in public or private areas are all critical elements of the unique aesthetics of the Key.

Health Care

Health care needs often determine a resident's length of stay on the Key. As residents age, there may be an increased need for health care services and a long-term care facility. However, such services may not be financially viable on the Key due either to the small population of the Key or FEMA requirements that would preclude some facilities.

Green Building

"Florida Friendly" landscaping has become the accepted methodology for minimizing the negative impacts on the environment resulting from the grounds maintenance on and around residential and commercial properties. The natural extension of this environmentally friendly philosophy has gone to building construction: hence the buzzword "green building".

In July 2007, the Sarasota Herald Tribune attempted to explain green building. "It is the practice of increasing the efficiency with which buildings and their sites use and harvest energy, water and materials. It also involves reducing the impact that buildings have on the environment and human health." Also known as "sustainable building" or "environmental building", green building presumably provides the benefit of reducing operating costs through increased productivity, use of less energy and water, better air quality, and reduced environmental impacts. Standards for green building have been developed all over Southwest Florida by various building associations. Some examples of methods and materials are: poured-in-place wall systems that can withstand higher winds and that are many times more energy efficient than concrete block; Energy Star-rated appliances and windows; solar water heating; and, native plants that require less water, fertilizer, and maintenance.